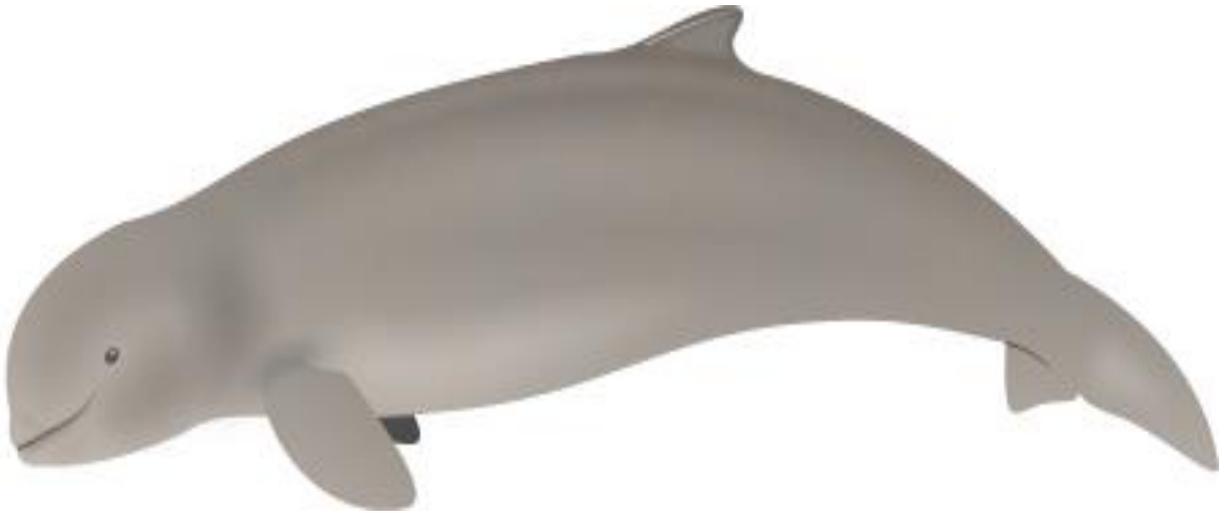


## Information for teachers



**Abb. 1: Irrawaddy dolphin**

(<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irawadidelfin#mediaviewer/File:Irawadidelfin.png>)

### **Classification:**

- **Kingdom:** Animalia
- **Phylum:** Chordata
- **Class:** Mammalia
- **Order:** Cetacea
- **Family:** Delphinidea
- **Genus:** Orcaella
- **Species:** Orcaella brevirostris

The Irrawaddy dolphin belongs to the class of mammals (*Mammalia*), order of whales (*Cetacea*). It got its name from Lake Irawadi/Irrawaddy (WWF-Factsheet).

### **Physical Description**

The Irrawaddy dolphin is identified by its bulging forehead, short beak, and 12-19 teeth on each side of each jaw. The pectoral fin is broadly triangular. There is a small dorsal fin, on the posterior end of the back.

When diving, this dolphin breathes at intervals of 70-150 seconds; the head appears first and then disappears, and then the back emerges, but the tail is rarely seen.

### **Size**

Head and body length is 180-275 cm.

### **Colour**

Irrawaddy dolphins are slaty blue to slaty grey throughout, with the underparts slightly paler (WWF-Factsheet).

## Ecology and Habitat

An inhabitant of marine and freshwater environments.

Irrawaddy dolphins are distributed in shallow, near-shore tropical and subtropical marine waters. They are primarily found in estuaries and semi-enclosed water bodies such as bays and sounds, usually close to mangrove forests. Freshwater populations occur in river systems (WWF-Factsheet).

## Population and Distribution

Freshwater subpopulations occur in the River Mahakam of Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), the Ayeyarwady (formerly Irrawaddy) of Myanmar (formerly Burma), and the Mekong Delta of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. They are also reported in isolated brackish (saltwater and freshwater) water bodies, such as Chilka Lake in India and Songkhla Lake in Thailand.

There have been serious population declines in parts of Thailand, and in the Mahakam River (Indonesian Borneo) freshwater sub-populations. The latter was classified as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List in 2000 after surveys found only a few tens of dolphins in an approximately 300 km-long segment of a river.

In the Philippines, the few Irrawaddy dolphins of Malampaya Sound (Palawan) appear to be geographically isolated from other sub-populations, which could earn that population the status of Critically Endangered. There, the dolphin population is in immediate danger of extirpation due to low numbers, limited range and high mortality. A 2001 survey put their population at 77 individuals over an area of 133 km<sup>2</sup> (WWF-Factsheet).

## Diet

The species eats fish and crustaceans

## Main Threats

Although the Irrawaddy dolphin is not directly exploited, it is exposed to incidental mortality in fisheries, the principal cause of depletion. Habitat degradation due to development of dams, deforestation and mining also continues to undermine the species to a lesser extent. The small population of the Mahakam River (Indonesian Borneo) and possibly that of the Ayeyarwady River (Myanmar) are also live-captured for display purposes (WWF-Factsheet).

Source:

WWF-Factsheet: Irawadi-Delfin: WWF Schweiz, Zürich.